

An Inaugural Thesis

on

Passed March 29th 1824
W. & H.

Dysentery

Dean

By

Greenberg Ridgely Junr

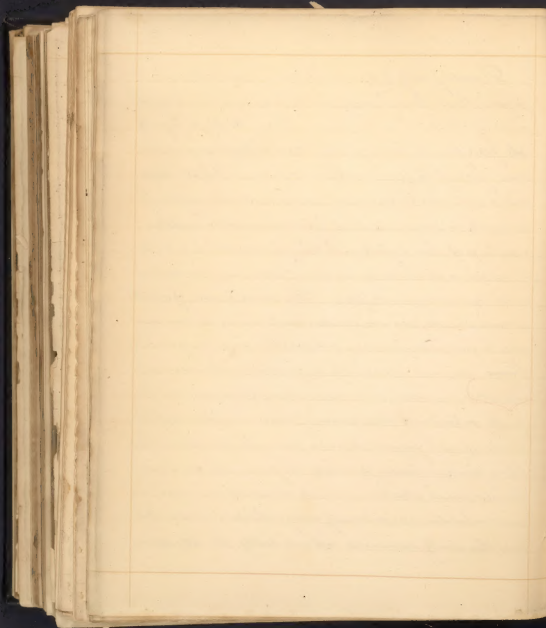
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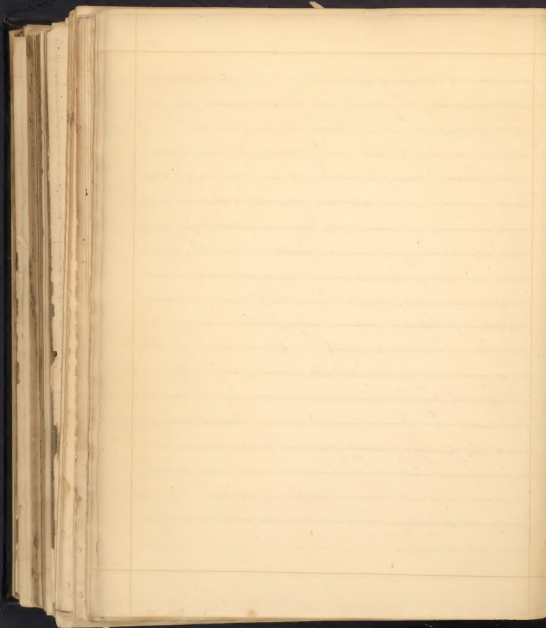
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Dysentery may be defined a disease in which there are frequent stools, accompanied with tormina and tenesmus, and generally attended with pyrexia. Though discharges frequently take place from the bowels, yet they seldom contain any feces, but consist principally of coagulated sanguis mucosus less streaked or mixed with blood; and when feculent matter does appear, it is usually in small hardened balls denominated scybala, a discharge of these scybala, whether it be accomplished by the effects of nature, or obtained by the action of medicine, is always succeeded by a mitigation of pain. This disease is most prevalent in warm climates, and in temperate climates during the warm season of the year; and in countries, and situations, and in particular seasons, also, most favourable for the production and existence of intermittents, remittents, and bilious fevers; and indeed it is frequently combined with these diseases; of this circumstance my opportunities led me to frequent observation during the last season, when bilious fever and dysentery prevailed; the former extended through low and humid situations, where the atmosphere was dense, and moist exhalations were continually rising; whereas in elevated situations, those usually denominated high and healthy, the latter disease

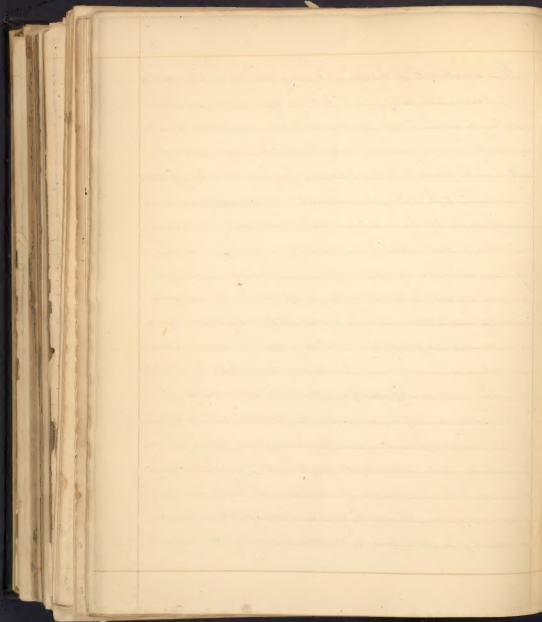


prevailed to the exclusion of the former. The remote causes of dysentery are various; the following may however be deemed most frequent; sudden and great vicissitudes of the atmosphere from heat to cold; the exposure of the body when constitutionally warm, or deprived of its accustomed covering to cold or humid air; sleeping upon wet or damp ground, and long application of moisture to the surface of the body, by wearing wet or damp clothes, all of which act by checking perspiration, and determining an unusual quantity of blood to the abdominal viscera. Among the remote causes of dysentery, we usually find consumed certain ingesta taken into the stomach, as animal food verging to a state of putrefaction; acid and unripe fruits, and even ripe fruits when taken in immoderate quantity. But the action of the latter set of causes is not quite so intelligible, because, as they are applied immediately to the surface of the stomach and intestines, a fever we should be inclined to expect diarrhoea and not dysentery. Nevertheless we must admit that dysentery is frequently produced by unripe fruits taken immoderately; but in approach'd ripe fruits seldom or ever produce this disease, and on the contrary if judiciously employed, will act as a sedative by keeping up the peristaltic motion of the alimentary canal.

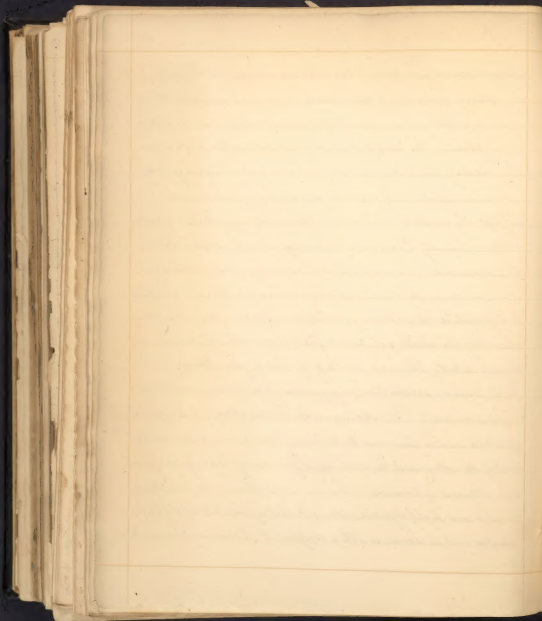


It is maintained by Cullen and many other writers, that dysentery
 after it has once taken place, may be kept up by contagion, or in other
 words may be communicated from persons labouring under the disease to
 the healthy. To this doctrine I cannot subscribe, because we can gene-
 rally trace the disease to its correct source, by referring it to some peculiar
 circumstance of the season, atmospherical vicissitudes, improper exposure
 to damp air, or injudicious articles of diet; and when it prevails as an
 epidemic to some unknown but peculiar property of the atmosphere.
 If it were contagious why does it appear at certain seasons of the year
 only; and only under certain circumstances? a disease strictly contagious
 must be so under all circumstances, and at all seasons of the year; and
 the peculiar virus or principle on which its contagion depends, must be capable
 of acting whenever it comes into contact with a subject not protected
 from its influence, independently of all external circumstances.

Dysentery usually comes on with a loss of appetite, sickness of the
 stomach, nausea and sometimes a slight vomiting: it is usually preceded
 by constipation of the intestines, and a painful distention of the abdomen;
 but in some cases it is preceded by a looseness of the bowels, and some
 degree of diarrhoea, though the stools are seldom free and natural.
 The desire to go to stool, from the very commencement of the disease, is

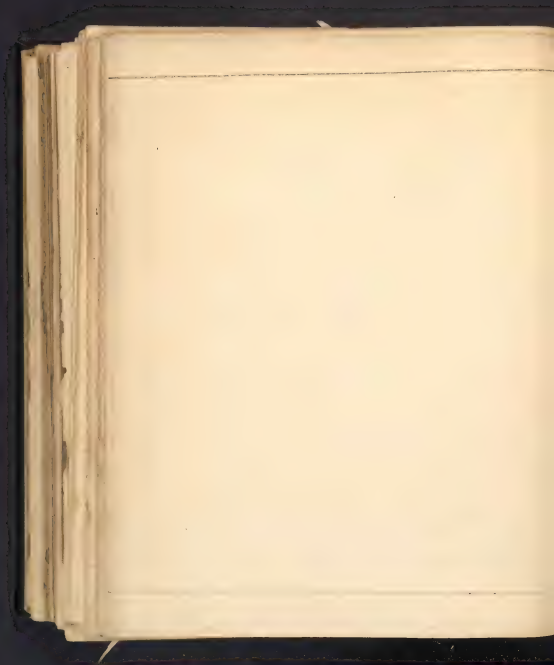


frequent, and in indulging it very little is voided; but the discharge is generally preceded by two gripping pains, and attended with tenesmus; a swelling near usually attends and then is a discharge of much flatus. The stools put on various appearances; commonly at first they consist of frothy mucus alone; at other times a mixture of frothy mucus and stool, with a small quantity of feculent matter; in the first they constitute the disease called mucus mucoerus or dysentery. Usually however, and particularly when the attack is violent, the stools are in the commencement discoloured with blood; sometimes we have a mixture of blood and undissolved mucus, putting on the appearance of lumps or bits of cheese; at other times a liquid matter is voided resembling the washing of putrid meat; and when the disease is extremely violent, there is a discharge of nearly pure blood. In the stools we seldom find any portions of feculent matter, so the natural contents of the intestines; when it does appear, it is in small quantities and in hardened balls, mounted to correspond with the cells of the colon, and the discharge is preceded by seven gripping pains, and attended by tenesmus. There is always attending the discharge a peculiar and highly offensive odour, so that a person but slightly acquainted with the disease, is able to recognise it the moment he enters the









nothing is understood of it. Hence, it is not to be taken
at its face, but only as a mere unadorned declaration and
recital of the fact of the existence of such a law, without the
least intimation of any other effect. It is to be seen
in relation which it holds with respect to every other source of
information, and design, and as a part of the whole.

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The tendency of the existing causes may be so great, as to induce a
disease of a violent & severe nature, as is often the case, of the violent
typhoids. The latter course, however, is more common in cases of
acute inflammation of the lungs.

The indications in the parchment, however, are strong
in its own favor, and

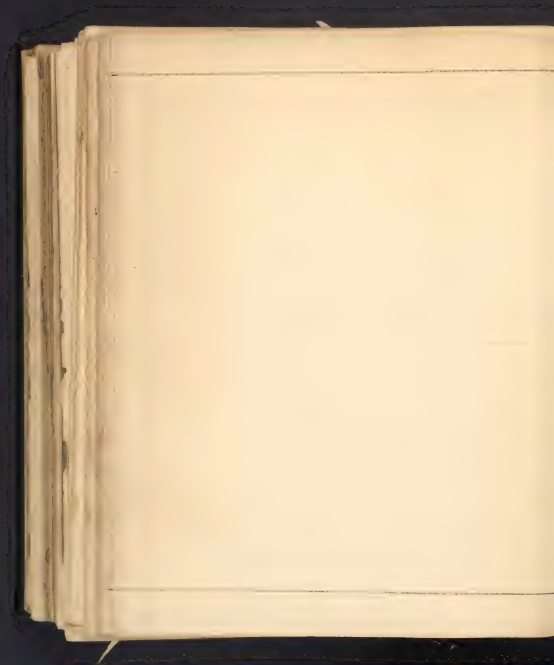
- 1st To remove the inflammation, redness and
2^d to remove the swelling of the throat
3^d to remove the thickening of the throat

and later it was made by Spencer and others to include functions
in fact and some may have been that the inflammatory and
nervous the intestinal tract may be removed from this connection that



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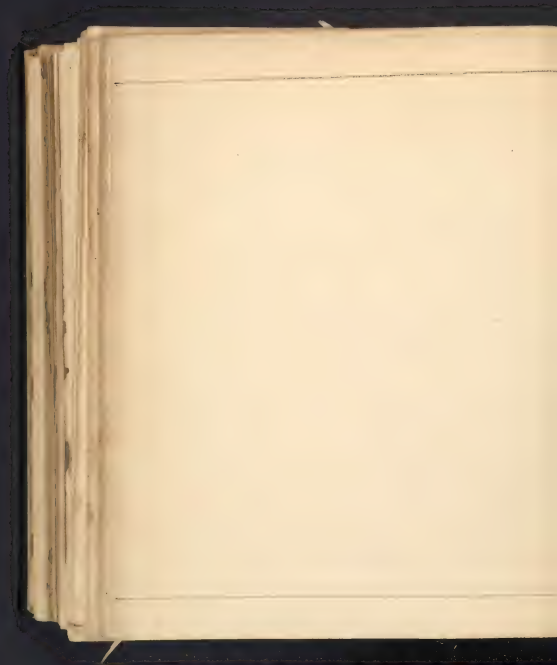


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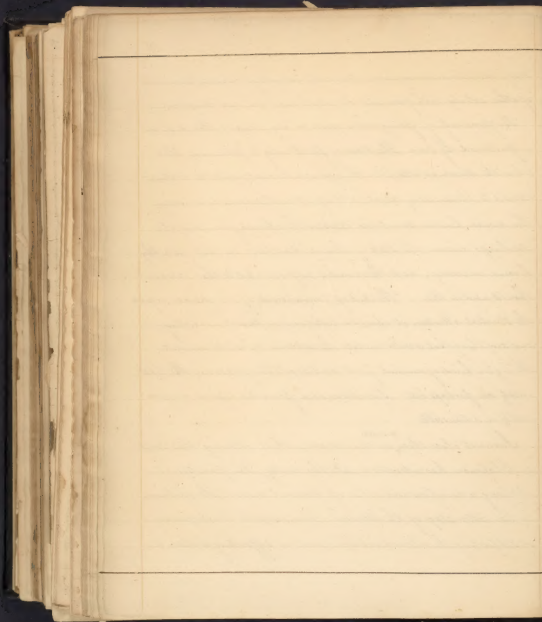


lung roots, are in many cases used with advantage, besides a number of other articles, both from the Vegetable and animal kingdom.

The propriety of giving astringents in any stage of this disease is questioned by some Practitioners; for it may be presumed that when the disease is attended with rigour in the onset, and the treatment carried to the necessary extent, astringents will seldom be necessary.

The disease however sometimes assumes the chronic form, and the discharges assume the state of those in dysentery; in that case they become necessary; and the remedies appropriated to that disease should be used in this. The diet of convalescents of this disease requires the strictest attention: it should be light and moderately nourishing; and any thing that would irritate the intestines must be avoided. The lighter kinds of animal food and vegetables possessing the least acidity are perhaps best. Spirituous and fermented liquors are generally inadmissible.

I cannot close these ^{remarks} on this disease, without observing that Dr. Ross in Chapman has introduced into this country, the practice of applying a compress and roller of flannel around the abdomen in the latter stage of the disease. It answers the double purpose of supporting the relaxed intestines, and of affording to them a



proper degree of smooth. Such advantage already has been
gained by the practice, and no doubt it will become much
more extensively useful.

